

# THE PROBLEM OF SANTA CLAUS IN THE SCHOOLS

Why the Character of the Christmas Celebration in the Public Schools Has Changed---Opinions of Preachers as to Whether Santa Claus Is a Desirable Visitor in Sunday Schools

If the curiosity of some little one should keep him awake on the night before Christmas till Santa Claus came down the chimney, he would probably be disappointed to find the old fellow less jolly than he has been pictured. For Santa Claus has been pictured as a man with a long white beard, wearing a red suit and a pointed hat, and carrying a bag of gifts. To state the case plainly, he is not wanted in places where he was once welcomed, and some people think the end of his reign is not far off.

Various influences are working to make him unpopular. One is science, which calls him a pagan myth and has made some grown folks believe it. Another is the Board of Education. Another, more surprising perhaps than the other two, is exerted in some Sunday schools.

Now, the Board of Education hasn't made any direct attack on Santa Claus. Its action has been indirect. For one thing it doesn't want the children exposed to danger of fire, and that bars out such things as trees with lighted candles, etc., which are an important part of Christmas celebrations.

Then there is the religious question. Anything verging on religious instruction is forbidden by law in the public schools. That limitation has an important effect on the Christmas celebrations.

The Board of Education has issued no specific rule on the subject, the matter being left to the discretion of the school principals. Thus, for instance, in a school where Jewish children largely predominated Christmas carols of the old fashioned kind would be out of place.

Considerations like these have had the effect of altering in a large measure the character of the Christmas celebrations in the public schools. The Board of Education didn't mean to do it, of course; but, nevertheless, Santa Claus is obviously being edged out of the public schools.

"It seems to be spoiling our Christmas pastimes, this new order of things," said one principal. "I have to explain to the children that Christmas means good will, such as was established at Bethlehem, but not being an expert orator, not yet a gifted minister, my efforts at talking about Christmas without giving what might be considered religious instruction are rendered difficult indeed—even ludicrous."

"Would you believe that one small pupil inquired why 'Will Bethlehem' always had the word 'good' before his name, and why I didn't call him 'good William'?"

On the other hand, there are some teachers who rather approve of the change, one of whom tells her pupils there is no Santa Claus, that their fathers and mothers should be ashamed to tell them there is.

The campaign against Santa Claus in the Sunday schools is direct. Thus, at Stroudsburg, Pa., Sunday school teachers have deliberately voted to obliterate Santa Claus and of course the jolly old gentleman stands little chance against such warfare.

In the churches and Sunday schools of Greater New York the contest over Santa Claus is going on. Just as the public school instructors differ in opinion, so do the various preachers. It is no stretching of facts to state that in nearly all denominations there appears an undercurrent of opinion working to bring about a change in the character of the Christmas celebration quite apart from the Santa Claus question—an undercurrent attributable to what the ministers call the "spirit of the times."

Here are some opinions of denominations regarding the proper celebration of Christmas. From Bishop H. C. Potter comes this apt message:

"I can only say I should be very sorry to see the old illusions about Santa Claus

disseminated. But it is well to remember that the modern spirit will find its expression as indicated by the reply of the very young gentleman who, upon being asked if he believed in Santa Claus, said:

"Of course not! But we keep it up in our house to give pleasure to papa and mamma."

In opposition to this is an opinion of the Rev. David J. McMillan, Presbyterian, who has declared:

A member of the Methodist Book Concern says that "Christmas trees and songs and manger exercises are right enough in church and Sunday school, but to bring in Santa Claus is like a pagan rite and all wrong."

The views of the Rev. Cortland Myers of the Baptist Temple, Brooklyn, are interesting if only from the fact that he says that his is the largest Sunday school in the world. Under his charge it now num-



"Santa Claus is a pagan myth, but through generations has been allowed to become an indispensable factor at Christmas. Parents are eager to introduce mythical nursery lore in public exercises for the children's pleasure. We must arbitrate with Santa Claus."

"In the church proper it is a desecration. Christmas is Christ's birthday. If the myth is not to be obliterated on Christmas Eve, Santa Claus and Santa Claus only should predominate in Sunday school."

It is unwise to combine religious services with Santa Claus ceremonies. "I suggest the Holy Nativity be the theme for the Sunday preceding Christmas, when the children will absorb some of the beautiful significance of Christ's birthday."

bers 2,500 pupils, with three superintendents and dozens of teachers. When urged to discuss the subject of Santa Claus, he said:

"Now, this is very interesting. I had no idea that some Sunday schools are instructing against our Christmas myth and the Board of Education aiding."

"You may say for me that I hope it will

be a very long time before Santa Claus is dislodged. It appears to me to be just an innocent deception. Santa Claus is in my Sunday school and shall stay there."

The Rev. Mr. Crosby of St. James's Church, Brooklyn, said:

"We have a Christmas tree and Santa Claus in our Sunday schools, too."

When the Rev. Dr. S. Parkes Cadman of the Central Congregational Church of Brooklyn was asked about the Christmas matter and his church, he replied:

"I regard Santa Claus as being helpful to children. Many of the lessons taught the people by our Lord Jesus Christ were through the medium of parables. The

Santa Claus myth is just that sort of mystic parable, beautified, appealing, churchly.

"It embodies the Christian precept of practicing good will among all men, and that is the theme for Christmas. When children outgrow the mythical portion and come to disillusion about Santa Claus, just as they develop in other lines of natural learning, they find the myth to have but concealed the true moral of Christmas."

"Santa Claus thus becomes the Christian spirit. Parents must meet this development and guide the Santa Claus parable as it should be guided, from the heavy burden of childhood's illusion to the true observance. There is no better example shown of this than in Charles Dickens's 'A Christmas Carol.'"

"Our spirit of this age is getting too scientific."

Dr. Cadman's main Sunday school numbers 650 pupils, with a Bethesda branch,



a Chinese branch and a new school just started. Santa Claus is not barred from these schools.

When the Rev. J. Wesley Johnston of the old John Street Methodist Church—New York's oldest church of that sect—was asked about Christmas and his Sunday school, he replied:

"It would be a great mistake to give up Santa Claus. We would not wish to put paganism to the front for Christmas, but just to preserve the old myth, basing it on Christian truths."

From the Reformed Dutch Church at Flatbush an emphatic endorsement of Santa Claus is given, through the Rev. Cornelius L. Wells, a descendant of those Netherlands colonists who planted their religion in New Amsterdam in 1624 and at Flatbush in 1630. Only a few months back this church celebrated its 250th anniversary. The Sunday school numbers 550 pupils and the congregation about 450 persons. Santa Claus owns even the church.

"If Sunday school pupils or my own grandchildren should ask me about Santa Claus and express any doubts as to his personality, I would answer, 'Look out! Look out! If you ask more such questions, Santa Claus will not come to you again.' I guess that would fix them," and Dr. Wells laughed and shook his finger at the said child. Then the smile died away and his face became serious with deeper, earnest thought.

"In these days of hurry-up living some people are so strained as to lean backward," said he. "The spirit of the time is toward science. It affects everything, even our churches and Sunday schools, and that is why the ranks in the Sunday schools grow smaller."

"I have always had Santa Claus at Christmas and have him in the school and church. Some churches are getting too scientific. Many of our old time members are gone from this historic section and but few of the old family names are here now, yet the old church keeps up its good customs and Santa Claus is part of them."

In Trinity Church, New York, Christmas means two important things for the children of its Sunday school. First of all, Santa Claus is barred from the church. Only religious exercises are held there, but they are of a nature so elaborate and beautiful as to delight old and young.

The afternoon before Christmas Day the Sunday school pupils march and counter-march along the aisles of the big edifice, singing Christmas carols. Then, as a production of the manager at Bethlehem, with shepherds and wise men and angels—all dummy figures that at other seasons of the year are carefully packed and stored away in the church tower. Through the medium of these figures arranged to depict the Bethlehem scene, the story of Christmas is taught the pupils of the Sunday school.

They march to and fro past the manger and the figures, singing, and with full understanding of Christ's birthday and the season for gifts and good will. They afterward proceed to the class room, where a big tree and gifts, with often Santa Claus added, are found.

That is Trinity's way of celebrating Christmas for the children. As every one knows, Trinity parish contains nine churches, viz.: Trinity, St. Paul's, St. John's, St. Chrysostom's, Trinity Chapel, St. Augustine's, St. Cornelius's, St. Agnes's and St. Luke's.

The Rev. Dr. Morgan Dix, Trinity's rector, said in the Christmas sermon he

brought up under Santa Claus, and my children were too. Why should I oppose him now? When the children grow up and learn there is no Santa Claus they can be told to remain children and keep on hanging up the stocking at Christmas—lots of grown people do that."

"But Santa Claus is not for the church."

## THE REV. MR. KEEVIL TELLS WHY CHRISTMAS GIFTS IN SUNDAY SCHOOLS ARE HARMFUL

"I believe more money is thrown away every year on Christmas presents than is pleasing to God or beneficial to the people," said the Rev. Charles J. Keevil, pastor of the Second Avenue Baptist Church.

This church devotes itself largely to work among the poor of the lower East Side. It has gymnasia and stereopticon lectures, boys' clubs and manual training classes, fresh air work every summer and a Christmas tree every Christmas.

"There is an enormous amount of money spent every year for Christmas presents to children in the various missions and churches," he continued. "I believe this money is not only wasted, but actually harmful."

In the first place, these presents are useless. They cost on an average perhaps 50 cents apiece. For 50 cents nothing can be bought that will give any value to the child or will last any length of time. Yet in the aggregate it makes a large sum.

"This sum if combined could accomplish something really worth while every year. It could, for instance, each year provide a really good home and education for some miserable, friendless child, until he was of an age to take care of himself."

"But the waste is not the worst of it by

any means. If it were merely a question of giving thousands of children a little pleasure each Christmas, I would not say a word. But this system of present giving fosters the worst traits of the children in our Sunday schools."

"We are systematically training children to come to Sunday school for the sake of getting something out of it. Every year there is a rush to the Sunday schools just before Christmas, for the sake of the Christmas presents."

"At our Christmas entertainment we actually have to barricade our doors against a mob. A crowd of children and adults gathers outside, and we have to have a cordon of men to prevent them rushing in and grabbing the presents wholesale."

"Then, children who are members of our school will walk by in the line, get their presents and then slip around to the end of the line and try to get a second one. Our church is not singular in this. All of them are subject to the same sort of thing."

"It is the logical result of the system. We are training up children who are looking out to get something for nothing."

"These boys, grown to manhood, will be looking for some one to buy their votes; and the girls, trained under the same sys-

tem, will approve the sale of the suffrage. We are emphasizing self, self, all the time, instead of emphasizing the need of the one poorer than ourselves—teaching selfishness instead of generosity."

"A church of our denomination in Lowell reached this decision many years ago. It set before its Sunday school the principle that Christmas is a time for giving, not for getting, and since then it has been steadily educating its children up to the plane of giving the money they would receive in Christmas presents to some one more in need."

"The children of that church now support a home missionary with their Christmas money, and I venture to say they have developed a type of character that would be ashamed to sneak around to the end of the line to get two Christmas presents."

"You may say, of course, that the money for these presents comes from the rich, who might as well give it as not, and the children might as well have the benefit of it. That is not the point. I am thinking of those who receive, not those who give."

"Understand me, this does not pertain to institutions of the church which are educational or social in their character and are kept open all the year around."

Children can make use of gymnasia, clubs, classes, stereopticon entertainments, and all such things, as they do of the public schools.

"These things are for the general benefit; all enjoy them alike, and the returns come in the form of health, mental improvement and social pleasure. Children are not pauperized by such returns as they are by personal, material presents."

"It may seem small to say that a child is pauperized by receiving a fifty-cent doll or new pocket knife for Christmas; but no one can do missionary work in New York without observing the grasping, tricky spirit engendered by the system. It is curious what different effects our efforts have under what we expected."

"The spirit underlying Christmas present giving is a beautiful one, the desire to give pleasure to children. But the result has been, I am convinced, to injure the children; to train them to feign an interest in religion in order to get something out of it."

"I have set all these things before our Sunday school workers and submitted the plan of only an entertainment and general good time for the children at Christmas, without individual presents. Their reply has always been:

"Why, Mr. Keevil, if you do that the children will all leave us and go to the schools where they give presents."

"And that is perfectly true. If we should omit to give presents this year, next year we would have no Sunday school."

"The only way to handle the matter is to have a union of all the churches in the neighborhood on the matter. As it is, we give no presents to children who have not been in our school forty Sundays during the year, and admit no pupils after October. That is more than most churches do."

"I wish we could have a church council of all denominations to discuss all such problems as are common to us all, and adopt a uniform plan of action. We may be divided on points of doctrine, but it is the function of the church to mould character as well as save souls, and surely on that point we could reach some common conclusion. It is a pity if in this commercial age the church is to engender the spirit of getting instead of that of giving."

"The same thing is present in an exaggerated form in the relief work done by the churches. I have had mothers say to me lately:

"What will you give me if I let my children come to your Sunday school? This

church will give us a ton of coal, and that one will give us a barrel of flour. What will you give?"

"The very fact that they are totally unaware of the impropriety of such a demand shows the effect our church methods have had upon them. These methods are developing the beggar spirit, instead of the spirit of independent self-respect."

"You may argue that these people are desperately poor and can therefore be excused. But that is not always the case."

"We have a fruit and flower mission here which distributes milk tickets. One family had had them so long that we investigated. We found three or four wage earners in the family, and their combined wages made enough for any family to live on in comfort. They had no more right to milk tickets than I had."

"I think church charity should be considered by such a council as I have described, and put on a basis of strict investigation. These actually in need should be relieved promptly and adequately. But it should not become a general policy of the church to relieve all who send children to mission Sunday schools."

"There is a difference between gifts

that injure and those that do not. You can establish all the free schools, parks, playgrounds, gymnasia, baths, libraries, museums and art galleries you want to and it will not injure anybody. Such things are gifts to the public, not individual charity."

"And you can take a friendless child and give him a good home and education, up to the age when he may reasonably be expected to go to work, and he will not be pauperized. The child feels instinctively that he cannot provide these things for himself, and that he has a right to preparation for life."

"But just as soon as you begin to deal out clothes, food and money, it requires the closest investigation to prevent pauperization. I believe the churches are too careless."

"As to Christmas presents, I think not only that Sunday schools should not give them, but that teachers should be forbidden to give them to their pupils in public schools. A Christmas present should be a personal thing, between two persons who are fond of each other. It should never be allowed to become the means of arousing a spirit of greed, envy or calculation on the part of a child."

## MECHANICAL TOYS THE FEATURE OF THE SEASON'S PLAYTHINGS

It will take a pocketful of money to fill the Christmas tree this year if the newer toys are chosen. Standard toys show no great advance this season, so far as New York is concerned, but the mechanical toys, which are in great demand, come high.

"It takes, for instance, \$300 to buy the train of cars propelled by steam up and down slightly feet of track. The engine is an eight wheeler, with boiler heated by an alcohol lamp. The train consists of three cars, with all double trucks and equipped with air brakes, a Pullman sleeper, a diner and a smoking and library car, all fitted with regulation furniture."

Close to each end of the track is a device which causes the engine to reverse, and a small whistle signals when the steam gauge registers too high pressure. About a dozen of these trains have been sold thus far.

The toy-selling season has really only just begun, but from Park row, the centre of toy purveying to small shops, to the Twenty-third street district, where the wants of the little children of the rich are satisfied, the toy is the same—the drift of sentimentality toward the mechanical toy. Oddly enough, the favorite toy is a mechanical automobile which retails in localities at from 50 cents up. This toy dashes frantically about when wound, a squeaky horn

sounding in the same impertinent fashion as the deeper toned signals of the big touring cars.

Of course, these are for the boys. Girls seem to prefer dolls to dolls this year. Not all girls have such simple tastes. A big uptown toy store has just sent to Europe for two small girls in England whose nurseries are beneath the shadow of a coronet, two dolls of medium size, each with a complete trousseau. The price of each doll and outfit is \$400.

Shipments of expensive toys to the children of the American wives of English peers are by no means infrequent, and in every case the most expensive toys are chosen. New York doll costumers are beginning to rival the productions of the French doll dressmakers. One New York store has a dozen young women who do nothing but construct dainty designs for costing dolls, many of which are sent to France, returning to this country as the latest Parisian novelties in doll costume.

In the line of the more expensive mechanical toys is a complete machine shop, that costs \$150. Smaller shops with fewer machines are sold at from \$22.50 up to the point where desire ceases and respect for large figures begins.

Machines are sold separately. A drill,

band saw, lathe, sawmill, grist mill, emery wheel, may be purchased for from 50 cents to \$5. These can be operated by means of a tiny electric motor of trifling cost, and are so well constructed that many of them are really serviceable.

Shaffing is sold separately, so that the boy who owns several of these machines may fit them to run all at once, perhaps through power gained by one of the engines in which a vapor lamp burning alcohol produces steam.

In engines there is endless variety, and the prices range from \$1.50 to \$50. These include the turbine engine—not an imitation but a real turbine, capable of being operated by electricity and the old time steam driven affair. The growing favorite with the boys seems to be the turbine.

Steam locomotives of ordinary fashion still dominate all the toy railroads where engines are operated on other than the clockwork principle. The latter rules in all but the most expensive toys.

These trains are seen in a completely equipped railroad yard, in which the block signal system is working, the switch lights being tiny incandescents, operated with the aid of a storage battery. There is a roundhouse, properly furnished, a turn-

table, &c.

Besides the yard a passenger station is seen, and then if it is wished to run the track through the city or country, there are bridges and tunnels arranged. All these things can be purchased piece by piece or in sections as preferred.

"Understand me, this does not pertain to institutions of the church which are educational or social in their character and are kept open all the year around."

The submarine boat goes on the surface of the water three or four feet and then dives, going about the same distance beneath the surface. It will then return to the top of the water, move a short distance and dive again, repeating this operation until it runs down.

These two inventions are considered the most ingenious of the season. They are rather high priced.

Wireless telegraphy has taken its place with the telephone among the toys. The miniature apparatus will transmit messages twenty-three feet, and is more technical in its operation than most toys, requiring some expert knowledge to operate it.

Among the animal toys this season are dogs, sheep and goats whose coats of shining white are of a particularly silky texture, while the animals themselves are amazingly realistic. These, like the majority of animal toys, come from Germany.

Three years ago a well to do woman was taken ill in a little German town. The illness was so serious that when she rallied she found herself a hopeless invalid. Her means were nearly exhausted and the future seemed a problem.

In other days she had made some little animal toys for the children of friends at Christmas time. Now she thought of her skill as a possible means of support and tried. To-day two blocks of buildings are required to contain the working force and storehouses of the business the invalid began in so modest a way, and her animals are considered by far the finest made. Hundreds of them are sold in New York

every year. Toy men say this is the most rapid growth of a toy industry ever known.

There are some highly interesting novelties among the animals of the jungle. One of these is a lion, while a second is a fierce coniferous tiger. Each is about twelve inches long. A walking lion or tiger is a novelty, but these beasts crouch and creep at one in so lifelike a way as to amaze. They are expensive, costing from \$7.50 to \$14.

German genius seems to have made a special effort with the animal novelties, and the humor of some of them is not the least attraction. One of these is a pig eight inches long, a mechanical toy, which runs squealing across the floor with a grim looking bulldog, whose teeth are fastened in the pig's tail, trailing behind.

Another is a tumbling monkey, which turns a series of somersaults. One of the best of all these creations is a clown about thirty inches long who lies on his back waving in one hand a stick at the end of which is a counterfeit moon, opening and shutting its eyes as the stick moves to and fro. At the same time the clown balances on his feet a small kitchen chair. This toy costs \$100.

The tiny girl and the one big enough to have

housewife's ambitions are both considered in variety. There are dolls that do everything good girls should, and they are of every size. Dolls' houses are models of what dwellings ought to be, and they are to be had at all prices.

The most expensive one costs \$135 and is two stories and attic high. It has eight rooms, gorgeously furnished, and as complete as any small household would have any right to expect.

For the more practical girl there are gas ranges on which cooking can be done. The kitchen in which these stoves are installed are completely furnished.

There are automobiles in profusion, and horses of every size, from the ten cent one of tin up to the real skin covered animal which costs all that any one cares to pay. Then, more beautiful than ever, are the Christmas tree ornaments of glass and metal.

In the Christmas tree, too, much attention has been given to electricity. Now it is possible to have a tree illuminated with ten bulbs, with batteries furnishing power sufficient to keep the tree aglow an hour, for \$10. Thus the cotton clad Santa Claus can this year perform his duties without fear of incineration.